

HONORS SUMMER READING RESPONSES: *HOW TO READ LITERATURE LIKE A PROFESSOR* by THOMAS C. FOSTER

Okay, students, I realize this isn't exactly beach reading for your summer vacation. However, I do think Foster has a nice tone and an entertaining style (as far as this kind of writing goes). My goal in having you read this work is to get you thinking about how to talk about literature. The goal of our course this year is really to equip you to use the language of literature, or the "language of reading" as Foster calls it, so that you can discuss literature in a nuanced, analytical, and insightful manner. I think Foster sets that framework nicely, and I believe reading this work will serve you well this year.

I would like you to answer the following questions. They are due on the first day of school. They can be handwritten or typed and should be answered in complete sentences. (Some answers may be slightly shorter and others slightly longer, but you do not need to write pages and pages in response here.) This is informal writing, so you may use "I" and answer the questions personally when appropriate.

1. Introduction: What does Foster mean by a "language of reading" (xxv)? What three items does Foster say separate the "professional reader" apart from the crowd, and why are these so important in interpreting literature?
2. Chapter 1: You have read a lot of stories about quests. What does Foster say the quest story is really about? What is a quest story you have read and enjoyed (other than those he mentions)?
3. Chapter 2: What is Foster trying to say about communion here?
4. Chapter 4: What does Foster mean when he claims, "there's no such thing as a wholly original work of literature" (24)? Do you agree or disagree with his statements here? Consider how chapters 5, 6, and 8 contribute to this point.
5. Chapter 9: Explain how rain and snow are often paradoxical symbols (pages 71-73).
6. Chapter 10: What point does Foster make about the purpose of supporting characters in a story?
7. Chapter 12: What is Foster trying to say about the recognizing and defining symbols? Does he mean that there is no right and wrong answer as to what functions as a symbol and what it stands for? Explain.
8. Chapter 14: In this chapter Foster asserts the importance of recognizing and understanding Christian imagery. Why does he believe that you need to "put aside your belief system, at least for the period during which you read" (126-127)? Do you agree? Explain.
9. Chapters 19-20: In these chapters, Foster is trying to assert that the author makes deliberate choices about his or her setting, and readers should pay attention to these choices. What is a story that you have read where the geography or season greatly impacts the story?
(Chapter 21: I don't have a question for you here. Just keep in mind that the physical aspects of a character are also important and often symbolic.)
10. Chapter 24: Cliff Fadiman said, "When you reread a classic you do not see more in the book than you did before; you see more in you than there was before." How does this quote clarify or relate to Foster's assertions in chapter 24?
(Chapter 27: I have also assigned this chapter, but I don't have questions for you on this one.)